



PRESS RELEASE

House National Security Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN FLOYD D. SPENCE

MOTION TO INSTRUCT CONFEREES ON H.R. 3616

FY 99 DoD AUTHORIZATION BILL

July 22, 1998

Mr. Speaker, while I do not agree with all of my colleague's statements, I am in complete agreement with him that this nation needs to do everything in its power to protect American troops deployed around the world.

In fact, when it comes to theater missile defenses, I was one of a number of members who felt compelled to take the highly unusual step back in 1996 of suing the Clinton Administration for consciously ignoring the law that established timetables and provided increased funding in order to ensure the fielding of theater missile defense systems to protect our troops. Likewise, many members who serve on the National Security Committee have helped to lead the fight over the past several years to prevent the Administration from implementing arms control agreements with the Russians that would slow down, "dumb down" and otherwise limit the capabilities of this country's theater missile defense capabilities.

The single largest loss of American life during the Gulf War was the result of a ballistic missile attack. And here we are, 7 years later, without a deployed theater missile defense. I would hope we could move past finger pointing, law suits and unsound arms control agreements and get on with the business of fielding systems to defend our troops against ballistic missiles. In this regard, I look forward to continuing to work with my colleague from Missouri to compel this, and future, Administrations to deploy theater missile defenses.

While the Cold War has been officially over for almost a decade, serious threats to this nation have not disappeared. As the recent report of the bipartisan Rumsfeld Commission indicated, the long range ballistic missile threat to this country is not 15 years down the road. In fact, the threat is here today, it will only get worse, and we may not have any warning of the threat until it is too late. The time, effort and resources many nations and rogue actors are investing to develop or acquire ballistic missiles and weapons of mass

destruction is truly frightening. I believe the Rumsfeld Commission report is one more nail in the coffin of the argument made by some that our nation does not, should not or will not need to build a system to defend the American people against ballistic missile attack. The threat is real, and it is imminent. So the question is not whether we build such a system...only when and how.

In that regard, I agree with some of Mr. Skelton's concerns. I do not claim to know what the proper technological answer or combination of answers is to the question of how best to defend the American people against ballistic missiles. If part of the answer is to deploy space-based weapons, whether kinetic or directed energy, then the nation should not hesitate. Space-based weapons may well prove to be an essential component of a long-term answer to defending Americans against ballistic missile attack. Frankly, in the near-term, I am more concerned with getting the Administration to commit to move forward with deployment of some missile defense, any missile defense, for the American public. American technological skill and ingenuity will ultimately show us "how," but it will not happen until our nation's political leadership demonstrates the will and commitment to address the threat with more than words.

In conclusion, let me once again commend the gentleman from Missouri for his leadership. When it comes to standing up for our men and women in uniform, he stands second to none. His motion to instruct is consistent with the House-passed bill and as such, I fully support it.